

**AGING IN COMMUNITY COMMITTEE MEETING  
OF THE COMMISSION ON AGING**

Date: April 11, 2023  
9:30 am to 11:30 am

“Universal Design for Senior Housing”

**Call to order:** Meeting called to order at 9:30AM

**Commissioners In Attendance:** Betsy Carrier (co-chair), Marsha Weber, Laurie Pross, Joyce Dubow, Mona Grieser, Mary Sweeney, David Engel, Barbara Selter,

**Staff:** Pazit Aviv, MoCo; Gemmena Murchison, MoCo; Betsy Luecking, MoCo

**Guests:** Sara Fought, Jewish Council for the Aging; Sara Swarr, MoCo Rec Department; Maria Day-Marshall, UMD; Scott Pruett, Universal Design Project; Shannon Guzman, AARP; Bruce Wentworth, Wentworth Studios; Barbara Sullivan, Village to Village Network; Stacy Sigler, Village.

**Opening Remarks from the Co-Chair:** Wayne welcomed everyone and reviewed the agenda for the meeting that was facilitated by Mona Grieser and featured presentations by four speakers addressing “Opportunities, Challenges, and Needs of Integrating Universal Design features into housing for seniors.”

**Approval of the Minutes:** The March 14, 2023, meeting minutes were reviewed and motion and second for approval.

**PRESENTATIONS / DISCUSSIONS:**

After some brief background remarks on the topic and the speakers, Mona Grieser introduced all the speakers and related guests at today’s meeting. Speakers included:

- Maria Day Marshall is the Director of the Realty Program at the University of Maryland School of Architecture and Planning, who has recently and unexpectedly had to renovate her home. She is a lawyer and has worked with the ageing and housing community in DC before moving to teach at the University of Maryland.
- Bruce Wentworth is the founder of Wentworth Studios in Bethesda, an architecture company which does design, build and renovations in Montgomery County and includes Ageing in Place renovations.
- Scott Pruitt of Universal Development Projects is a co-founder and executive director of the Universal Design Project, a nonprofit based in Virginia that focuses on increasing demand for universally accessible housing. He has lived with a spinal cord injury for over two decades.
- Shannon Guzman, MA, MCP, is a senior strategic policy advisor at the AARP Public Policy Institute. Her areas of expertise include livable communities, housing, community planning, and transportation policy. She worked on the AARP Livability Index.

Maria Day Marshall was the first speaker and talked about her personal experiences with caring for her mother and unexpectedly having to care for her husband following a major car crash. Her husband was left critically injured and needed accommodation in the home to function. Maria had to consider major renovations to her home as the existing doors, steps, and baths could not accommodate wheelchairs. The renovations were costly and not all could be done. Maria’s story led to a larger discussion about the financial burden that universal

design features can impose, especially when needed immediately for an unexpected crisis. Maria's contact information is: Maria Day-Marshall: (301) 405-6795, [mdaymars@umd.edu](mailto:mdaymars@umd.edu)

Bruce Wentworth was the second speaker and talked about remodeling options that his company has designed and installed, such as showers, baths, and elevators. He agreed that not everyone has the money to do this level of renovation and that tax breaks are needed if universal design features are to be more mainstreamed. Bruce indicated that more older homes need to be retrofitted and new homes need to be designed with universal design features, especially if the occupants plan to age in place. Bruce's contact information is:

Bruce Wentworth, AIA 240-395-0705 x 200 [bwentworth@wentworthstudio.com](mailto:bwentworth@wentworthstudio.com)

Scott Pruitt was the next speaker and spoke at length about the need for home modifications through universal design concepts. Scott sustained a spinal cord injury at age 18 and talked about how a crisis forces the need to make accommodation in the home. He talked about his injury and the difficulty accessing not only his home, but the homes of friends who he visits. Budget is always going to be a barrier to large scale modifications; however, new homes need to be built with functionality to allow individuals to age in place and/or be cared for in place. With the average age of homes in the U.S. about 40 + years, and about 19 percent of the population disabled, the big question is how to build universal design functionality into new homes and existing homes. Scott has developed a resource guide and a free online course (it's several short videos) about the need and the lack of accessible housing, for those interested. It can be accessed at <https://go.universaldesign.org/housing> Scott's contact information is: [scott@universaldesign.org](mailto:scott@universaldesign.org); website: [universaldesign.org](http://universaldesign.org); phone: 540-358-0137

Shannon Guzman was our last speaker and presented a series of slides on the demographics of the U.S. population and the changing need for more age-friendly housing options. By 2034, People 65-plus will outnumber those 18 and under for the first time. One in five Americans is a family caregiver and 38 percent care for someone living on their own. Less than one percent of the homes in the U.S. have features needed to support aging (and/or caring) in place. Thirty-four percent (34%) of all adults say they need to make changes to their home to enable them to stay there. Fifty-three (53%) of all adults believe it is important to have homes that are more accessible and include features like no-step entry, wide doors, and first-floor bedrooms and bathrooms. Older adults (65 plus) want well maintained homes, affordable options, and location / proximity to activities and services. The challenge for governments is to establish age-friendly communities with housing options, amenities, and transportation. Shannon spoke of actions that can be taken to advance more age-friendly communities. These include:

- Raise awareness about aging.
- Take a holistic view of housing and livable communities' policy issues and solutions.
- Create a toolbox of solutions to address a wide range of community and housing needs, including:
  - Zoning laws and regulations that allow for homes with accessible and universal design features.
  - Home modification programs.
- Share your knowledge about community needs, challenges, and solutions.

Some key related AARP resources are available at:

- AARP Future of Housing: [www.aarp.org/futureofhousing](http://www.aarp.org/futureofhousing)
- AARP Livability Index: [www.aarp.org/livabilityindex](http://www.aarp.org/livabilityindex)
- AARP Public Policy Institute: [www.aarp.org/ppi](http://www.aarp.org/ppi)
- AARP Livable Communities Resources:
  - [www.aarp.org/livablepolicy](http://www.aarp.org/livablepolicy)
  - [www.aarp.org/livabl](http://www.aarp.org/livabl)

Shannon's contact information is: [sguzman@aarp.org](mailto:sguzman@aarp.org)

Following the presentations, a lengthy discussion ensued with lots of questions for each of the presenters and lots of discussion among the commissioners. Many commissioners felt that they learned a tremendous amount about universal design and wanted to continue working on this topic over the longer term. There was a suggestion to prepare a longer-term action agenda the AIC could take to tackle some of the issues raised at the meeting. Many commissioners believed that this is a long-term program that is ripe for the AIC and the CoA.

**OTHER BUSINESS:** No other business to report.

**UPCOMING PUBLIC FORUM:** Wayne provided a brief update on the public Forum. He asked for volunteers for helping the day of the Forum.

**UPCOMING MEETING:** The next AIC meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 9th at 9:30 am. The focus of this business meeting will be a debrief on the Public Forum and lessons learned from the program that could be translated into a long-term action agenda for the AIC.

**MEETING ADJOURNED:** Motion and seconded to adjourn meeting at 10:53